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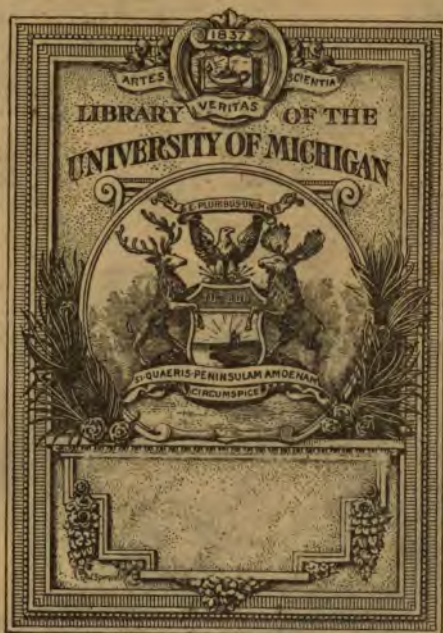
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THE FLOWER SELLER
AND OTHER POEMS

THE
FLOWER SELLER

AND OTHER POEMS
101973

BY

Blanche Fitz Roy.
LADY LINDSAY

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

LONDON, NEW YORK, AND BOMBAY

1896

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TO

SIR EDWARD BURNE-JONES.

MASTER, whose true and noble poet-thought
Breathes to the canvas songs of mystic lore,
There where thy painter-touch bids Fancy pour
The Tyrian hues she for thy palette wrought—
Friend of long years—take thou the book I've sought
To mould as worth thy treasuring. Nay, more;
Remembrance and Affection, to thy door,
For choicest gifts I with glad hand have brought.

Great art thou named because of wondrous skill;
Haply most great in that life's earlier part
Found thee as strong as thou art steadfast still:
A rock, that saw'st the shallow ebb-tides go
Back on quick shifting sands of troubled Art,
Though now full waves of praise toward thee flow.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE FLOWER SELLER, ...	1
OUTREMER, ...	25
THE WORTH OF A SONG, ...	57
THE GENTLE KNIGHT, ...	79
THE STORMY PETREL, ...	85
THROUGH FIELDS OF ASPHODEL, ...	88
IN SLEEP, ...	92
INTROSPECTION, ...	97
LONG YEARS AFTER, ...	103
A SPACE OF SUMMER, ...	118
TO A FAIR MAID, ...	122
SEPTEMBER THOUGHTS, ...	124
DECEMBER SONG, ...	126
OF A BIRD-CAGE, ...	128
COSIE SONG, ...	130
INCONSEQUENCE, ...	131
EARTHWARD, ...	133
THE GOLD-WORKER, ...	135
WIND AND FOAM, ...	137
SICILIAN SONG, ...	139
TWO MESSENGERS, ...	140
WEST OF THE MOUNTAINS, ...	141

SONNETS—	PAGE
SONNET OR SONG, ...	145
TO MINE OWN SOUL, ...	147
THE PASSING HOUR, ...	149
WRITTEN ON MY BIRTHDAY, ...	151
OF REMEMBRANCE, ...	153
LOVE'S DIAPASON, ...	155
LOVE SAYING, ...	157
ON THE CARDS, ...	159
FOLK-SONGS, ...	161
EVENING AFTER RAIN, ...	163
B.C. 500, ...	165
LUCINDA'S LETTERS—	
I., ...	169
II., ...	170
III., ...	172
IV., ...	173
V., ...	174
VI., ...	175
VII., ...	176
VIII., ...	177
IX., ...	179
X., ...	180
XI., ...	182
XII., ...	183
XIII., ...	185
XIV., ...	186
XV., ...	187

THE FLOWER SELLER.

‘Glycera, the flower girl, knew so well how to diversify the combination and arrangement of her flowers, as with the same flowers to make a great variety of nosegays.’—S. FRANCIS DE SALES.

A GALA day! On this thrice glorious day
He should return, the young king, to his own.
The city, banner-drest—by wreaths made gay
As are fair brides, or garden plots rich grown
For Phœbus—decked with silk her walls of stone,
O’erflowing in each open court or street
With folks of happy look and eager feet.

The war was ended; healed the gaping wound
That wept alike man’s blood and woman’s tears;
A new bright cycle this, with joyance mooned,
And grace, and plenty; pass’d and gone sad years,
Therefore forgot; forgot all pains and fears.

A

Peace waved her wand, and, at her sweet command,
Hope and Content came gladly, hand in hand.

Now while, within an ample market-place,
The wealthy burghers and my lord the mayor,
Collared and robed, awaited, grave of face,
Their earliest mounted messenger who'd bear
News of a near approach, or conned with care
Th' illuminated scroll that prayed the king
From loyal kingdom take warm welcoming :

Out to the meadows, where the road lay white
'Twixt fragrant limes, the joyous people went ;
And every vantage place, on left or right,
Was quickly seized and held, the green boughs
bent

By jealous grasp. Yet some ran far, intent
They'd be the first the coming show to meet,
The first that homing warrior-band to greet.

From every steeple clanged quick gladsome bells,
And answering chimes sped softly o'er the plain,
As if in echo ; so a lover tells
His mistress that she knows, till she be fain
In turn to falter back such tender strain.
Then, as the grateful world to sanctify,
The sky grew clear, the sun blazed bright on high.

Still from each gate the hurrying people poured ;
Gay as the rampart flags their festive dress.
Across the moat all drawbridges lay lowered,
On every chain and beam a mighty stress.
Red gleamed the roofs and towers numberless
Capping yon ancient walls, and twinkling eyes
Of narrow casements mirrored back blue skies.

Hark ! for already creeps to straining ears
A murmur faint, so faint, so vague, so far,
Scarce may it be discerned. Nay, nay, it nears.

A white streak mounts th' horizon, like a star
That lifts to dawn. And, as on harbour bar
Sea-tides inflowing moan, the broad fields ring
With a fast-gathered cry: 'The king! The king!'

Yea, from the dust-white cloud that, rolling, spread,
All tremulous-specked of steel and steeds and men
And tattered blood-like standards borne o'erhead—
With fitful music, bursting now and then
To wildest jubilation, next quelled as when
We mourn dead brothers—slowly drawing near,
Did that victorious host at length appear.

Not yet distinguishable. Troop on troop,
In glittering line (as though a sword were laid
Down the straight road) loomed closer, but no group
Clearly detached, only the king, arrayed
In armour flashing gold, great radiance made,

(As 'twere the hilt,) with princes at his side,
And jewelled shields and panoply of pride.

The brave young king, mounted on milk-white steed,
His gilded helm swathed with a knot of bay—
Leader of men, right worthy proved to lead,
Yet by a boyish gladness ruled to-day;
And, thronging close, on this triumphal way,
As many a time in fierce and famous fights,
His company of wan and war-stained knights.

Down, down upon their path green laurels rain,
And roses red; these Love, those Victory.
What matter wound or scar, or gory stain,
Or toilsome march, to such as hear the cry
Of long-lost wife and child? The crowds press nigh,
And drown the drums with joy of voice or hand.
The king pulls rein and smiles; his horse must stand.

High from the city wall soars trumpet blast,
And *feux de joie* peal thunder from broad towers,
O'er-clamouring noisy belfries whence are cast
Hailstones or snows of fair and perfumed flowers,
That strike the surging multitude in showers,
While kerchiefs, with girls' arms for flag-staffs, wave,
And boys shout loud huzzas to cheer the brave.

Then, as the king, not far now from the gate,
Raised his pleased eyes the merry sight to see,
Lo, distant scarce a yard—in meanest state—
A slender maid gazed from an apple-tree,
And caught his glance with hers—'mid green boughs,
 she
Sat perched, half-hid; her silver feet hung bare;
Her rags ill matched the glory of her hair.

She smiled, and, as he looked, so also smiled
The king; for she was bright and fair as day,

Large-eyed, most beautiful—a winsome child.
Then threw she down in haste and pretty play
A wealth of buds. But he rode on his way,
Indifferent, and nor turned, nor looked again,
But passed from sight amid his gorgeous train.

Swift dropt she from the branch as might a bird,
Most light, that cares not to unfold its wings;
And one long sigh she gave, but ne'er a word,
And stood with shading hand, strange marvellings
Brimming her eyes beneath the dusky rings
That crowned her brow, till onward she was borne
By hurrying crowds which rocked like swaying corn.

None cared for her, though many knew the child.
A flower-seller—but she'd wasted all
Her wares, forsooth! Gaily the army filed,
Fast threading, riband-wise, the gateway tall,
So stormed the town, with townfolk great and small

Crushing close after. Thus the day wore by,
And the red sun dropt westward in the sky.

Then stillness fell upon the meadows grey,
And the brown walls loomed dark as though nor
light,

Nor merriment, nor joy, within them lay
To greet with torch and dance the summer night.
Then every tender thing that for affright
Had hid, or fled in unknown wilds to roam,
Came softly back to seek its former home.

So through the gloom, from out some shadowy nook
That the broad ramparts gave of murky mist,
There crept a barefoot girl with furtive look,
Whose rippling locks her slender shoulders kissed ;
An empty basket swung upon her wrist ;
Empty her hands—the meanest coin unearned,
And naught of food for lips that fevered burned.

She sought the shelter of the poorest street—
To-night a desert—onward hasted sore,
Wild, spirit-like, with eager gliding feet,
Until she reached her goal—then pushed the door,
And, dreamful still, a-trembling, stood before
Her sisters twain, her mouth with strange smile set,
As though thereon the sunlight lingered yet.

‘Well come, and what hast seen?’ One wrought a
 plait

Of straw that grew apace beneath her hand,
While by a circling wheel the other sat,
And from the spindle drew soft flaxen strand,
Turned soon to gleaming thread at her command.
‘Say, Brunhild, what hast seen? what news dost bring?
Wags the world yet?’ ‘Nay, I have seen the king.’

‘Ay, ay, the king—the rumour is he’s young.
Tell us how tall, how short; red, dark, or fair?’

Old Anna came to chat—thou know'st her tongue—
She much extolled his gracious princely air,
Yet gave of praise the very fullest share
To gilt-mouthed trumpeters! But come, child, draw
Thy pocket; where's thy gain?'—'The king I saw.'

Her elders laughed. 'Good luck to those grey eyes!
I had no time—not *I*—to seek the show.'
'Nor *I*—to-morrow at day dawn we'll rise,
And with our humble wares to market go.'
Thus spake they wrathfully, so she should know—
That youngest one—harm lurks in loitering.
Yet stood she mute, then sighed: 'I love the king.'

Thereon she fled away to loneliness,
By laughter chased as though by stinging whips,
And reached a scarce-used loft where none might guess
To find her lying low, with moaning lips,
Sunk safe in store of hay and dusty chips,

While bats swung 'mid the rafters overhead,
And darkness, for cool counterpane, was spread.

But from yon fatal hour her aching sight
Strained at an idle vision—poor fond maid,
Who saw the king ride on, by day, by night,
In clanking harness wondrously arrayed !
On her young soul some spell was surely laid ;
Full oft he glanced (she deemed) with laughing look,
And peace and joy forthwith her heart forsook.

Last grew she sick. She haunted all the ways
Where he might pass, not daring draw o'ernear ;
She shrined the palace in a reverent gaze—
Her choicest flowers unsold—yet fled for fear
When heralds' greeting told her listening ear :
'He comes, he comes, the king !' So mighty he !
A beggar maid, his poorest vassal, she !

Now for thanksgiving should the court attend
Beneath the great cathedral's misty dome,
In state, with warrior chiefs, the knee to bend
Because that these victorious reached their home,
Nor in strange land for battle-quest need roam ;
So should the wide Te Deum's solemn note
From human voice and deep-toned organ float.

All were held free to see the sight who willed,
The town once more pranked out for holiday.
Quoth Brunhild : 'On the bridge I 'll stand,' and filled
Her panner with rich blooms : carnations gay,
Roses, and flower de luce, and orange spray.
The perfume sweet so strongly touched her brain,
'Twas half a pleasure, half a madding pain.

She fell to singing snatches of weird tune ;
Next, like a merry wild goat, skipped a space ;
Nodded to one, or told some grandame's rune ;

Beckoned another, smiles upon her face,
Peeping 'twixt posies in her youth and grace ;
Yet ne'er bestowed a leaf. 'Nay, nay,' she said,
And went her way with proud uplifted head.

Upon the bridge she stayed her steps, and found
Cool sheltered rest from mid-day heat of sun,
There, where a quaint-walled house cast shade around ;
For on those ancient piles stood many a one,
With low-browed shops whose trade was briskly
done

That day, when coral, seed pearl, fine-chased gold,
And glass-cut beads and garnet strings were sold.

Below the bridge the restless river ran,
Not yet by summer parched on stony bed,
But flowing, rushing, as the life of man,
(Thought Brunhild) or perchance as Fate more
dread,

More chill, and with relentless message sped
T'ward dark stone arches, carrying on its way
All straws and drifts that would such strength essay.

So stood the child until her heart grew faint,
Her set lips wan—o'erhead her garlands raised
Lest they too droop—a young and gentle saint
By unseen angels crowned. Yet was she crazed
(The passers said, while on her rags they gazed),
That bartered not for coin, at buyer's call,
The perfume of a rose ephemeral.

For 'mong the rest came many an eager swain
To seek a flaunting posy for his dear,
Or one choice gilly-blossom bud which fain
He'd tilt with jaunty grace behind his ear.
Good Sir, in vain! no reason will she hear.
'All, all is sold,' she cries, nor whispers how
Her blooms were picked the dusty path to strow.

Ay, when the king shall pass, his charger's feet
May trample freely, treading down a gift
Most honoured thus, while hers be triumph sweet;
For then his gracious eyes he'll surely lift
With radiant glance, as when bright sunbeams rift
Dull clouds; then, quick alight in glad desire,
Her soul must kindle his with answering fire.

She waits. Anon the herald army comes;
Scarce dare she gaze as men and steeds draw nigh.
Her pulses throb in measure with the drums,
Red as the bannered silk her cheeks flame high
Weak in the jostling throng she reels; she'll die!
Yet seeks the parapet with trembling knees,
And climbs, swings high her wreaths aloft, and sees.

Yea, sees—the king in velvet robes that gleam
With sheen of jewels bright as are his smiles;
And satin scarves wave out, and ribands stream,

To grace the peaceful pageant that beguiles
This happy folk to idleness through miles
Of flowering land, while from the joyous rout
Peals many a cheer and glad triumphal shout.

And by him, close on his right hand, behold
A beauteous lady riding, clothed in white,
Whose snowy palfrey, bridled with pure gold,
Keeps pace with that brave charger, steel bedight,
Whence bends the king, smiling in new delight
Toward the lovely damsel at his side—
His chosen queen, his fair affianced bride!

Swift ran the turbid river, and thus fast
On swept the shouting serried multitude
In wake of royal pageantry, that passed,
As by a mighty swarm of bees pursued,
Unto yon vast grey dome crowned with God's rood;

Then loud huzzas died out on the warm air,
And o'er the crowd fell the soft cloak of prayer.

The bridge is left a desert path of stone;
Forsaken its gay booths and vantage towers.
Yet, in a shadowy nook, grief-struck and lone,
With arms still lifted to her pile of flowers,
A childish form against the grey wall cowers.
Sudden she rises, angered, pale as death,
And flings her burthen to the swirl beneath.

Ay, let them die, the senseless petalled things!
Roses sharp-thorned, crushed bells, and sickly bloom!
Some quick engulfed, and some, with painted wings,
Still floating ere they yield to watery tomb;
But all like idle hopes—that erst would loom
Perfumed, well-nurtured, on a phantom tree—
By grief now smitten to obscurity.

B

Yea, as she were herself but one of these,
Brunhild waged war with her heart's grief no more.
She lay in narrow bed, sick, ill at ease,
Heedless of all who passed or pushed the door,
Of sun or shadow slanting on the floor,
Of Time himself—for Time is Life and Light;
To her strained eyes the whole sad world was Night.

While, as she grew more weak, her mind distraught
Made her lips garrulous, and oft she cried :
' I love the king,' and thus in fever taught
Her madness to the sisters at her side.
They, with chilled heart, sought from all folk to hide
What seemed in truth a sore and shameful thing—
Still, she, unwitting, wailed : ' I love the king.'

Then, as to please her, spake the second. ' Dear,
A-hawking goes our liege to-morrow morn,
With him the princess; they must pass anear,

Threading the west gate, so to thee 'll be borne
Some merry echoes of the hunting horn.'
Whereat the child turned in her lowly bed,
Stretched her thin hands and raised her weary
head.

And prayed : ' If e'er ye loved me, listen now.
My pleading's not for long. Yon is green grass—
The very thought nigh cools my burning brow—
Without the gate—there where the king shall pass.
My limbs are weak to walk or stand, alas !
In pity carry me to that fair spot.
I fain would see him, though he knows me not.'

' Nay, nay,' the answer came. She wept full sore,
And wrung her hands—a piteous sight to see—
Might she but gaze upon his face once more !
Till spake that gentler sister : ' Child, let be !
Pray heaven no harm thereof may come to thee.

Weep not; methinks our mother feels thy tears,
Though she has lain in grave these many years.'

They wrapt her in a mantle grey and long—
Their mother's gear—and bore her to the place.
But, when she came the gay-drest folk among,
A wraith she seemed, with weird unearthly
face,
And all forbore to press, so gave her space,
Or, pitiful, sighed out: 'Alack, dear heart,'
Seeing where faint and wan she lay apart.

One sister turned—her soul o'ergrieved and proud;
But she—the younger—crouched, and on her knee
Pillowed the child, heedless of place or crowd,
Till—when the loud horns rang, and all could see
The falconers in their greenwood livery
Spring from the drawbridge, and the royal pair,
In green arrayed, with hawk on wrist, most fair—

Low whispered Brunhild : 'Leave me now and run.'
'But whither?' 'To the king! Woe's me, I'm blind,
A cold mist creeps betwixt me and the sun.'
Soft was the brown-tress'd head laid down, and kind
And swift that other sped, no glance behind,
Nor pause till she the highway's breadth might gain;
Then reckless stood, and bade the king draw rein.

Rough hands were on her shoulder, but he leant
From saddle-bow and spake in quick amaze—
Not wrath—so told she trembling her intent :
'My sister dies; that thou wouldst come she prays.'
The courtiers laughed in scorn, with mocking gaze,
While he, the king, still wondering, stared toward
The dusky figure stretched on grassy sward.

A shadowy thing—from which the people shrank
In some strange fear, yet more through reverence;
A spirit form—whose face most white and dank

Drooped like a storm-dashed flower of innocence.
The princess looked ; her pity grew intense.
' Dismount we,' so she prayed ; ' a king 's decreed
For servant to his poorest serf in need.'

' Yea, sweet one, at thy will,' her knight replied.
Thus hand in hand, alone, afoot they trod
The grassy bank, and silent stood beside
That childish grey-clad palmer on the sod
Dropt weary, ere she travelled home to God.
Low bent the princess, lifting her ; but she
With hungered straining eyes the king would see.

Therein the royal maid read store of pain,
That brought from her own eyes a gushing spring.
Quick asked she : ' Where hast seen her ? ' But in
vain

Ransacking mind and memory, sought the king,
With puckered brows, perplexed—he could not wring

From life's remembrance aught, and yet a gleam—
A girl's bright face—flit past him as in dream.

Certès a phantom—some gay laughing elf,
Twin mould evoked—nay, but if *that* were ghost,
What should *this* be, this semblance of herself,
A pallid sheath which life too soon had crost
By chill, as many a tender leaf is lost ?
' I know not,' quoth the king in whisper low,
' Haply I saw her once—would I might know !'

Thereat the princess took his twain clasp'd
hands

In gentle wise, though forceful, drew and laid
Them under Brunhild's fainting head for bands
That pillowed and held fast the slender maid.
So for one quick-lived instant, unafraid,
The craving eyes on longed-for goal reposed—
And after, weary of this sad world, closed.

While round about, most strangely hushed, the crowd,
With silence pregnant more than noisiest sound,
Fuller of speech than shouts or wailings loud,
For that sweet spirit made lament profound.
The very babes grew mute, the birds spellbound.
Yea, quivering leaves upon the bushes stilled,
And overhead dull mist the azure filled.

Then, in grave reverence, bowed the king his knee,
As from strong grasp his burthen seemed to fade
And sink to earth, and, with right hand set free,
He doffed his rich plumed cap beside the maid.
So likewise knelt his bride and weeping prayed.
And lo ! all people knelt, with bated breath,
For presence of the mightiest monarch—Death.

OUTREMER.

Down by the sea, i' the hollow of the land,
A dreamer sat with chin on hand.
The tide welled in and the tide welled free
Up from the depths of the murmuring sea,
Rounding the rocks over glassy sand,
Up to the shingly shelving beach,
Till a fringe of foam lay white on the reach,
Like some feathery band
About the neck of a slumbering maid,
In yellow shimmering dress arrayed.

The dreamer gazed where the sea shone blue—
A sapphire hue—
As far away as sight could view.

He fain had trod the path that the sun
Cleft golden-wise the waters through,
And dipped his fingers, one by one,
And gathered the radiant field-blooms there

Beyond compare,

To bruise,

And use,

For stain of vellum with colour more rare
Than Urban the Pope in his robes might wear.
More kin such tint to the heav'n-spun dress
By Gabriel, the archangel, worn,
When he swept down, in cloud-loveliness,
To a garden of lilies one clear spring morn,

Our Lady to bless

With the message from God's high city borne.

But a poor monk this, who in his cell,

With tremulous hand,

From morn till eve sought hard to spell

The letters that Nature could so well
 Paint over the land
For the calendar of her own fair book.
 He strove to look
Into the wonders of every curl
Of bud and leaf, to catch the dust
That stains the butterfly's wing like rust,
 And mirror a pearl,
As though the tide had just cast it up
 In an opal cup.
The pallid scorpion-grass he drew,
 And the fever-few,
And crowned the page he loved most well
With a miniature wreath of asphodel.
 Yet all the time,
 Like a haunting rhyme,
Which the heart holds true but the ear's forgot,
 A colour he knew
 Of seraphic hue—

Alas! the good monks had it not.
And well was he 'ware how temptation creeps in
If the door of the heart
Be left open in part;
How a longing thought soon swells into sin,
When such a growth is let begin.

Yonder, see the cloister roof
O'er bleak sandhills' solitude,
With the chapel's meagre spire,
And the gateway low and rude
From grey granite roughly hewed
Now the vesper bell is ringing;
In the choir
Monks are singing—
One, alone, has stayed aloof.

Long—ah, 'tis a long while since!
To the convent came a guest,

Named by prelate or by prince
For some distant saintly quest.

On his way,
From the brethren nigh the sea,
Craved he hospitality—
One short night, but ne'er a day.
So, in stable warm, at rest,
That white mule on which he
rode

Munched what kindly hosts bestowed
As for quadrupeds the best;
While its rider sat in hall,
'Mid th' obsequious brethren all,
Drinking mead with thirsty mouth

From a silver beaker,
Telling legends of the South,
Italy, and France, and Spain,
Till the abbot and his train,
Growing every moment meeker,

Blushed, as they 'd ne'er blushed before,
For their barren northern shore.

Lastly, that strange comer took
One small book
From the wallet, leather-bound,
Tied with cord his loins around.

He was graced,
From chin to waist,
By a long grey beard that flowed
An it pleased, in Eastern mode.
Hands he had so spare and thin,
You could trace all bones therein,
When the book and silver clasp
Lay within their quiet grasp.

O wondrous book ! A novice young—
A stripling pale, of eager tongue—
Whose wayward heart in tendrils curled

Toward the fair things of this world
As bindweed climbs a rose—
Though sure the goodman gardener goes
Each day with shears,
And clips and tears,
Nor counts the poor weed's throes—
This lad, agape with wonder and with joy,
This foolish boy,
Knelt to the missal which he deemed
To hold th' incarnate beauty he had dreamed
So oft, so oft! Delectable wild flowers
Damasked each page of yon brave book of
hours;
For every prayer
Was scrolled a frame most fair,
Or, ever and anon, a picture, wrought
Of Mary's life, pure as an angel's thought,
Serene as though great Luke himself had
fashioned it.

Next, golden words in golden letters writ,
That climbed the page on some unwitnessed stair ;
While, best of all, behind them, like the sea

That backs gold-masted fisher-boats—
Or, as th' ethereal anthem backs quaint notes
Of music penned, and through the measure floats—

Or, as the heavens that be
Calm far beyond us, placid o'er our moil—
So th' entrancing restful blue
(The youth had dreamed of through his hours of
toil)

Lay spread the whole book through,
Clear as a summer night, fresh as the dawn's own
dew.

He wept—he could not speak ;
On either cheek
A tear coursed slowly down because that he was glad.
Divining, asked the stranger monk : ' Dear lad,

Lov'st thou this colour? Is't to thee so new?'

'Yea,' quoth the boy, 'God's heaven is painted blue,'

And said no more, but only once again :

'God's heaven is blue, as is His shifting main.'

'True,' spake the envoy, smiling in his beard.

'Years gone, along a sultry Tuscan plain,

A boy—Giotto they called him—steered

In shepherd-wise his peaceful flock to fold,

As David did of old ;

And watched the hornèd moon increase and wane,

And watched the broad blue spangled veil behind,

Whereon the wind,

Most mischievous, chased gossamers of clouds

That angels spin and weave for shrouds

Of dying saints. But, as years went,

The boy took brush and palette—such his bent.

'Twas he who limned the frescoes with a master hand

Of th' Arena Chapel—ay, 'tis said he planned

It like to blue convolvulus, and welcome vines
Grow round, for hot the summer noon-ray shines
In burning dusty Padua. Thence I came,
And oft have viewed the cool distempered wall—
The tint thereof imperishable, by name
“Beyond the sea” or “outremer”; some call
It likewise lapis-lazuli,
A precious gem that’s brought across the sea,
Beyond the sea in beauty. Nay, content thee, I
Will send thee, boy, a chip from off our sky,
A drop from our warm southern shore!
Yet learn to still thine o’erwrought anxious brain.
Drink deep—so haply Giotto drank—of hellebore,
That herb of Christ—plucked first on classic
plain
By Grecian shepherd’s hand—yea, taste of
peace.’ Thus spake
A stranger guest in days long past, and laughed,
And once again the brimming tankard quaffed.

The novice felt his quick heart like to break
For joy, and punctuated thanks with happy tears.

But syne that day had sped calm measured years.
The dreaming boy to earnest manhood grew,
And with quotidian labour drew
Illumined page on page, until
His fame spread wide,
And people whispered, wonder-eyed,
Far, far beyond the monastery gate,
Of one young monk's transcendent skill,
And how, at love's own labour, dawn, noon, late,
He worked. Alas! Ne'er yet
Had come from o'er the sea that promised shaft of
blue
On which his ardent soul had long been set;
With prayer he partly learned the lesson 'to
forget';
And seldom now for aught but simple tools

Travelled a vagrant wish. His needs were few,
And his trained mind forbore
To soar
Outside the cramping convent rules,
Albeit for him, had he so pleased
(He was a favourite son) they had been surely
eased.

He dwelt obedient in his cell, content,
With fair head bowed above a desk, to limn
Whate'er the good monks asked of him,
And best content when he had spent
His inborn talent, rich and full,
Close, as it were, to God's own feet.
The brethren deemed his work a miracle,
And he a chosen angel sent
Straight down to bless their calm retreat;
Thus all went well. Yet not to-day.
To-day a dull oppression filled the air;
In narrow haunts the worker could not stay.

His mind was sore and ill ;
His pulses fiercely stirred ;
The blue horizon beckoned him away.

A bird,
That lighted on the window sill,
Sang passionate, as though 'twould bear
Unto the prison-like abode—which all
Earth-joys forsook, fearing the high stone wall—
A breath, a whiff from some fair isle
Where golden fruit hangs ripe, and maidens
smile
Whom men may clasp close, heart to heart,
In world-forgetting kiss,
To part
O never more from such unutterable bliss !

So went he out ; one moment stayed
Within the chapel. In a corner dim,
He knelt and beat his breast and prayed.

Some slumberous voices faint intoned a hymn ;
Some pallid rushlights twinkled at a shrine,
Where dusky shadows on mosaic played.
To his sick heart this day no message seemed
divine.

There are such days for all and every one.

Unto the shore—

The sandy shore where he might roam alone,

The humid shore with ne'er a soul in sight,

And scarce a muffled roar

From out the low-lying crescent of the bay,

Whose salt sea-spray

Gives stinging strong delight

To eyes and lips, intoxicating brine,

Renewing sense and spirit as with wine—

Unto the shore he sped, and sat him down

Beneath the warm cliffs' tufted crown,

Where grow sweet clover and long grass.

There could he hear the small birds pass—

The martins, out and in from nests
Above him—they upon their quests
Of midge and fly, and he, keen-aimed as they,
Busily seeking. Yea, he sought for Peace.
And presently, while yet undying was the day,
She came, as might a white ship o'er the bay,
With floated wings to greet him, so her light touch
fann'd
His cheek, and on his brow she laid her tender
hand,
And gave the troublings of his brain release.

Then, sudden, once again it seemed
He was an eager boy who dreamed,
Most innocent, of some bright-coloured gem,
A wondrous pigment, torn from off the hem
Of southern skies and seas; and surely—as he
smiled,
Because of how for love thereof

His boyish heart had once been wild,
And surely—as his wise self tried to scoff
At the remembrance quaint—that thralldom weird,
That subtle phantasm from afar appeared,
And grew, and grew,
Until he longed with fire
Of ancient re-illumed desire
To hold the gift of eastern blue,
E'en as he longed of yore.
Thus the strange craving which he thought had
died,
Slow filtered as a low-ebbed tide,
Returned like foam on shore.

He took never a count how long he stayed.
O'er the face of day drew quiet shade,
As gathers oft-soon
In afternoon
Of the noblest lives that for earth are made.

And—just as in such,
When noontide brilliance begins to fade,
Some spiritual tenderness grows o'ermuch,
More nigh in touch
With an unseen world it had but begun
To mirror the radiance of—one by one,
Rose-colours paled from sea and sky ;
And, by and by,
Grey Evening, in her pilgrim's dress,
Wan, lustreless,
Across the bay stretched quiet hands,
And blessing laid o'er hills and sands.
Then, spirit-like, upraised herself the moon,
From curtained couch of clustered violet,
As though the sun—conscious he must forget
Our world for a brief space—had bade her soon
Rule from his empty throne when he should set,
Albeit in his broad garden, ere he went,
He planted pinks and April verdure sweet

For the white feet,
That on steep travel would be bent,
Of her—pale star-crown'd consort whom he sent.

Then likewise rose the monk and went his way.
Faint was he, who had tasted nought
Since early morn that day;
The fierce-fann'd passion of his thought,
Scorching all want till now,
Had burned itself at last so low,
Hunger found room to enter with an angry
throe.

Yea, uprose that poor monk—awearied he,
And stiff—and wandered slow
Toward the monastery. He could see
Spare outlines of the building grey and cold
Against the cowslip sky—
Walls of his life-long home—a fold
For feeble sheep 'gainst worldly wolves that try

Them to devour. Landward, some wind-bowed
trees

As ink-blots marked the garden space. Near
these,

Upon a bleak and storm-swept eminence,
The graveyard stones seemed but a stride
Beyond conventual silence; thence
Might tired souls sure as obedient spring—
And with as little fear—

When far and wide
The judgment trumpet-call should sound,
And wake their sleep profound—
As now embodied brethren stirred to hear
The chapel's feeble clapper ring.

On this the painter monk mused while he strolled
along,
Skirting the bay with laggard feet that sank
Deep in the sand, as did his staff, among

Small mounds and pitfalls, soft o'ergrown
With tufted grass that fringed the shadowy bank.
His figure, tall and lank,
Moved slow, a white-clad spirit lone
Of that lone northern coast :
Nay, part by struggle, part by abstinence, made
light,
His soul and body waxed as disunite
As one were dead, the other but a wandering ghost.
And all things earthly in his sight grew small.
A few short years (he thought), but few at most,
He and his follies bulbwise must be laid,
By pious monks with shovel, hoe, and spade—
As in its turn each monkish body lies—
Consigned to yon grim graveyard's thrall,
Though fresh-born lives, in change perpetual,
Shall blossom thick through coming centuries.
What then of yearnings? If for red or green,
Purple imperial, gold, ultramarine,

Or if for some fair woman's charms,

A woman's arms,

A woman's golden hair flung on your face,

And 'gainst your beating heart her figure's grace,

You yearn and long—

Why, where's the difference, say? Where then

The greater or the lesser level

Of the desires of men?

Where hides the deeper wrong?

All, all vain dreams are prompted by the devil,

Who baits his hook with what may best inspire

His fish—the sinner—to the chase;

And dubs the bait no name that's mean or base,

But only 'Heart's Desire.'

Thus argued he, the dreamer, as he went,

His own mind for antagonist

That oftener echo-like chimed in than spake dissent;

Yea, ere he reached the convent gate he wist

No heart's desire but one: to lay him down,
Exchanging frock and hood for heavenly robe and
crown.

No other need seemed worth a sigh, no whim

To him

Worth breath of wishing. Earth in dusk lay hid;
With it all earthly thought. A shrouding mist
Hung low across the sleeping sea.

The wind had hushed, and heaven's great firma-
ment,

Like to a radiant silver lid

Of some dark tomb, shone spangled with bright
stars.

Far o'er the lea,

The sandhills' undulation here and there was rent

By scars

Of gulleys deep, meandering out and in,
Where heather-patches and the thick-spiked whin
Broke through grey arid fields of straggling bent.

Yet all these landmarks that he knew so well

He saw no more, but only guessed,

For in a blur of shade were they soft pressed

To calm mysterious and magnificent.

He could not trace the outlines of the fell.

"Twas as some spell

Fettered the world by gentlest swathing peace,

And only overhead

Yon anthem, of bright star-notes spread,

Thrilled to bid human troubles cease.

Ay, let the thought bring rest !

When puny human life is sped,

Heaven's clear, and quiet falls on every anxious
breast.

Soft stole he in 'twixt sheltering convent walls,

Whose gates for him were gladly thrown apart ;

The 'open sesame' of his great art,

Might it not break a thousand petty thralls ?

But, as he crept the corridor along,
Weary of foot, though reconciled of heart,
There met him a bewildering throng
Of many monks who swiftly ran
From out each passage, every door—
With hurrying patter
And marvellous clatter,
Like sound of mice on granary floor—
And one and all and every man,
A clamorous history quick began,
Flocking around in a hustling crowd,
While each talked fast and each talked loud.
He looked from brother to brother aghast,
Ne'er had he known them chatter so fast !
And lo, the din
Pursued him in,
Though he fled as quick as able,
To take his sup
From one porridge cup
Left on the refectory table.

But, sudden, all fell back, for there,
In blear torchlight, half down the stair,
Stood the abbot grave, with lifted hand
That, like to a crozier, could scatter the band.

Kindly his air
As nigh he drew : ' Peace, all is well,
My son, yet come—myself will go
With thee for speech unto thy quiet cell.
Good brethren, tarry awhile below.'
The young monk paused—in his upraised eyes
Was a dreamful look of mild surprise,
Though withal—thought the abbot—they shone
more bright
Than e'er was their wont until to-night.
No torches but stars had kindled such light.

The white-washed cell was poor and small ;
Of comfort spare.
Only a lamp of iron swung,

D

Flickering faint o'er the table where
Books and pens and brushes lay,
In neat array,
Waiting the master's hand ;
And, 'mid the shadows on the wall,
Below the crucifix there hung
A narrow picture—Byzantine,
The abbot termed it, when one day
'Twas placed thus by his kind command,
Because he deemed the painter's work divine,
So would have holy things anear it. Spread
About were varied glues in pots and pans,
And water-cans,
And gilding tools, and shining flecks of gold,
With vellum strips,
And feathered tips,
Vermilion red,
And rare dyes manifold.
But in the midst, just where the lamp-light fell,

And burned
Most yellow in that cold white cell,
The monk's quick sight discerned
A linen cloth—a package new.
It was a cloth such as are used to hold
The powdered hues of worth untold
Which from the Orient come, or Italy,
With, on its frayed-out marge, a stain of blue—
The very blue that's named 'from o'er the sea.'
Then, as he looked, and as, with tremulous hands,
The artist loosed some silver-threaded bands
That held the cloth, as eager thoughts came
swift—
Too flooding swift for words, while, in his breast,
O'erwhelming joy down press'd—
He could not find a breath for to rejoice.
He heard the abbot's voice,
That seemed to bring the warm South in its drift,
Yet from his own full heart no utterance could he lift:

‘Lo now, my son !
Our brother from beyond the sea
Hath not through all these years
Forgot thy joy, thy tears.
Here is the thing for which thy young soul yearned.
God’s will be done,
And His Name praised ; ’tis He remembered thee.
Behold, an implement !
A heavenly colour sent
To make thy pious work more fine and great,
And bring thee that most pure content
Thy saintly artist soul hath surely earned.
Dear son, meseems, if patient-wise we wait,
The Lord bids—not all things—but some
Unto our earnest longings come.
He blesseth thee with gifts ; yea, He hath lent
Thy talent unto thee to use,
Not as thou wilt, but as Himself shall choose.

So take my blessing likewise ; if we deem it sweet
When prayers be answered, eke we hold it meet
For those unanswered still the Lord to praise,
Who treads His Heaven—we grope through
human ways.
Be blest, my son.'

Then quoth the monk, ' Amen,' and bent his knee :
' Bless me again, O father, bless thou me !
Truly my heart is but untamed and wild,
And I for human ways too oft have yearned,
Leaving thanksgiving words and deeds undone.
Pray then, O father, for thy wayward child.'
' Yea, for us all,' the abbot said, and smiled.
So knelt a space, and after rose, and turned,
And left the cell. At that the other stept
Toward the linen bag, and took
The wondrous gift—remembering how his eyes had
wept,

And his soul thirsted—in quick hands that shook ;

And to his mind it seemed as though

The beauteous blue should overflow,

And steep his fingers in rich hue,

Like oft in dreams he'd bade the sea to do.

Yet now he dreamed not—nay, but garnered close
again

The powder in its linen folds, and bent

Once more his knees most reverent ;

Then raised him, and with wistful gaze unto the
casement went.

He looked out on the sombre main,

Beyond the sandhills—all was black ;

The moon deep hid behind a cloud,

Enwrapt in sable shroud,

And cheerless were heaven's doorways, curtained
dark,

Faint lit by starry spark.

Below, scarce could be seen the track

Of murmurous waves upon the sand-bound bay,
While plaintively they sighed alway,
As if, in semi-sleep,
Unto the stars mourned spirits of the deep.

‘Not all,’—the monk spake gently—‘Nay, but some
Of our most weary wishes wander home,
Poor birds sent back from distant lands to trace,
And find again, their calm familiar place.
Perchance upon my soul at last falls rest.
Is it not purged of longing? God knows best
Whether to grant or to withhold.
Let no man crave an idol wrought of gold,
Naught that is earth-stained. If he would be wise,
Bid him seek out such precious gift as lies
Beyond all seas, beyond our sphere, beyond
This piteous throbbing life of which we’re overfond.
So to us here, e’en to the least, may come
Some answering flash from yon unerring dome.’

Lo! as he spake the great moon burst
Out her black cerements, and the land—
The broad grey tracts of sand
That erst
Were dark as pitch—illumed. Then the wide
dreamful sky
Gleamed rapturous to effulgent light on high,
Where stars 'gainst diamond dust of stars
Clung thick as years that sand the plains of Time
Of which man's life counts scarce a handbreadth. On
the water's breast,
As down a floor of steely bars,
A silver path, sprung from the pebbled beach,
Ran straight to reach
Unto the far horizon of the west.
And in the midst slow rocked a fisher-boat—
A speck, a swarthy human life, a mote—
Alone; all else immense, immutable, sublime.

THE WORTH OF A SONG.

CLOSE nestled where the chalk hills curve and dip
Ere their broad lines into green valleys slip,
Hard by an ancient quarry's frowning lip—

Girt safe with belt of juniper and yew,
The riotous March whirlwind dared not through,
When from chill East his white-maned coursers drew—

A farmstead raised its gables, chimney-stacks,
And deep roofs, glinting in red fiery tracks,
With many a cone-shaped hay-rick at their backs

Prank'd out for wintry hoard in neat array.
And there—long years ago, so gossips say—
Three brothers dwelt, in amity alway.

Three brothers, young and brave of life and limb,
To whom the outer world seemed void and dim ;
Each loved his fellows twain, and they loved him.

Orphaned in name, but scarce in loss, at call
Of one the others ran—no grief too small,
Nor joy. The farm gave maintenance to all.

Thus passed their boyhood's span. They tilled the
ground,
And fertile earth brought answer all around ;
Folks marvelled at wise heads on young necks found.

Yet oft, when sporting in short holiday,
The brothers sought the hills that, sea-like, lay
Green, undulous, as in primeval day.

Far, far as sight, the velvet turf spread fair,
Untouched by spade or hoe or ploughman's share,
With sombre yew-trees studded here and there ;

Such yew boughs as each youngster learned to bend
In bow or javelin shape, such as might send
Unto some traitor heart rewarding end.

They wrestled oft, boy-like, yet loving-wise ;
Rousing no anger in each other's eyes.
They practised how a disk of iron flies ;

Or snared wild game with nets. The third who
most

Sat calm as umpire—truly, 'twas his boast—
Grew garrulous when twilight, pallid ghost

That lulls some minds to silence, woke up his
(Being a poet's) with impassioned kiss,
And tender yearning in itself a bliss.

Close crept his comrades, clambering at his knee,
As though grown lads were children yet, while he
Unfolded for their ear sweet mystery :

All that his keen soul wist, nay, read in cloud
Or sunset, through night's swarth emblazoned shroud,
Or if the distant sea moaned out aloud ;

Or in the Future—youth's most precious book,
Where every round-cheeked learner seeks to look,
Fraying the page with eager finger's crook.

Broad schemes they laid, these three! 'Twas no
surprise
That he, the youngest, with his mother's eyes,
Could peer so far across life's unknown skies.

The eldest was of mood more fierce and bold.
The next o'er taciturn, too self-controll'd.
But he—cast half in child's, half angel's mould,

Guessed many a secret from the birds and flowers ;
Perchance because he lay, long summer hours,
Listing to thrush or finch 'mid hawthorn bowers.

From such calm hermitage he fondly plann'd
His brethren's lives. Right beautiful and grand,
Earning men's praise and wonder through the land,

Those glorious lives, strong tools in hand of Fame,
Should gild afresh an honoured golden name—
Though England's roll knows ne'er a son of shame.

Thus dreamed the boy; then, when through scant
trees shone

Queen Moon, three hearts that beat in unison
Home wended, toil and play alike being done.

And so to wholesome supper; next to rest—
Dark hours of sleep by tranquil prayer made blest—
Till the great sun once more 'gan journey west.

Serenely fair, the blameless days went past,
And each revolving season fled more fast.
It was the eldest brother spake at last:

‘Dear ones, farewell; to man’s estate I’ve grown.
Keep ye the homestead; I am called alone,
For some are marked in need their country’s own.

War, like a lurid star, gleams in the north.
Grant me your blessing, ere I sally forth
A poor recruit, as yet of untried worth.’

Soon was that valour proved to every eye;
In martial ranks his place grew quickly high;
The battle heat he pleased to defy;

Till, on the eve of a decisive day,
To lead some hope forlorn he chose to stray,
And met his death at outset of the fray.

Alas! to him from thenceforth mattered not
The issue of the fight—he cared no jot;
His limbs on alien soil must lie and rot.

Senseless his eyeballs, staring at the sky,
Though all war's panoply should clatter by,
Though mighty armies clash, advance, or fly.

Cut down like grass in field to fade unknown,
Cold, struck at heart, mere food for hawks, there prone
He lay untombed, unmarked by cross or stone.

E'en so unchronicled, his name of pride
From Fame's bright scroll like dust was brushed aside.
Peace be to him and those who with him died.

A year revolved. Again the homestead leas
Bloomed ripe with harvesting ; in golden seas
Rippled the wheat about the workers' knees.

The two young owners of the farm were there,
Taking of toil and heat their willing share,
Locks backward toss'd, and glistening shoulders bare;

While to the echoing grass-grown hills rang out
Full many a jolly quip and laughing shout
From all the busy happy peasant rout.

The main—a riband blue to bind the sheaves—
Lay dim beyond the barns and low-roofed eaves
Where dark-winged swifts twittered in ivy-leaves.

But now the white and winding pathway, lo !
A stranger climbs with footsteps sad and slow ;
Dust-stained his garb, pallid his face of woe.

A wanderer from the wars, who paused awhile—
Gaining his breath—blinked at the sun's hot smile,
And fainted when he reached the reapers' file.

What news ? Alack ! when that sad tale was said
Each brother saw the other's tears, and read
The meed of pain that bowed a brother's head.

While all men stood in reverent grief beside,
Until those twain whom Fate had so denied
Passed from the midst, and sought their dark fireside.

But hour by hour the warlike echoes spread.
Folks told dread tales—the very skies gleamed red—
Who paused to grieve for one brave heart struck dead?

Great slaughter bred a pestilence. Each day
The poor in hundreds died. Chill famine lay
Where, locust-like, armies had ta'en their way.

Uprose the second brother, nobly fain
To succour such as writhed in need or pain,
To ease the torture of the plague's dark stain.

One hand-grip—brief farewell. His comrade sighed;
He jested. 'Nay, 'tis long ere eventide,
I'm scarce at life's noon yet'—so spake in pride.

E

Alas ! a few weeks sped, he lay and burned
On couch of pain, with wistful thoughts that turned
Like homing doves ; for boyhood's peace he yearned.

To him it seemed—now strength was ebbing fast—
Swift as a dream had been that tender past,
By Death's stern verity too soon o'ercast.

What's Time but treasure idly spent ? Though here
Where men cursed Fate, racked with sore pain and fear,
Some grateful hearts replied that held him dear ;

And blessed him ere they sighed life out and slept.
Close drew he to the hospice wall, so wept,
While o'er his mind one long-lost memory crept :

A slender form, a face beloved and fair,
Kind mother-eyes, a crown of red-gold hair—
A scarce-shaped vision fleeting into air.

Soft rose the De Profundis' solemn stave ;
The fainting soul, caught by God's lifting wave,
Passed out to space. They bore him to the grave.

A pilgrim to the chalk hills wended,
A pilgrim old and grey,
Whose eyes had seen yon brave life ended
While he, too, plague-struck lay.
The farmer stood with shadowing hand
And gazed out o'er the fruitful land.

Within his orchard stood he, leaning
'Gainst a gnarled apple-tree,
While all around sweet blossom, screening
Earth's wintry nudity,
Uttered rich promise, far and near,
That autumn plenty should appear.

He bade the palmer welcome, fed him,
And gave him of the best ;
Next morning o'er the hillside led him,
And scarce the old man guessed
How a deep wound, ne'er to be healed,
Clung fast to silence for its shield.

Then turned the stripling farmer, lonely,
Unto the house he loved ;
Empty and chill it seemed, for only
His shadow therein moved ;
Outside, the merry labourers quaffed
Their honied mead, and sang, and laughed.

He paid them, each above his earning,
And bade them swift begone.
Then, from the barns and byres spurning
The dumb beasts, one by one,
He opened doors and coops and sheds,
And drove the poultry from their beds.

So fled they, much affrighted, straying
O'er fields and hilly land ;
Only the great dray horses, neighing,
Came fondly to his hand,
Until he tore a bough of ash
And beat them from him with the lash.

Last, when all in and out the dwelling
Grew mute as his own soul,
When sombre twilight, night foretelling,
Began her cloak unroll,
The man whose life was desolate
Left hearth and home and garden gate.

To a new world, with arms entreating
As one stone blind, he went.
Well to be blind ! Nor kiss of greeting,
Nor glad smile, might be bent
On such poor mourner, whose bruised heart
With naught of earthly world had part.

Yet 'twas a little space he'd journeyed
When sudden, palsy-shook,
Down by the road he sat and turned
His wet regretful look
To that old home, half dipt in hill,
But half in moonlight outlined still.

Yon shutter, with one pane quite broken—
His brothers crushed the thing
In mimic strife—he'd kept as token
(Which set folks wondering)
The empty gap that grinned like grief;
For never yet he'd feared a thief.

Yon tree—whose leafage, sharp as fret-work
That backs the church-choir stalled,
Held great white clouds in prisoning network—
Yon tree o'er-well recalled

An hundred talks, the ring-dove's nest,
Long summer hours of peace and rest.

Then sobbed the lone man, till much weeping,
Self-answered, calmed his breath.
'Mid the smooth hills all things were sleeping ;
Silent the vales beneath.
Only a light wind rose and sighed
As some dead voice had fain replied.

Erewhile an archer—so the story ran—
A fine-built youth of wondrous skill ;
(The king's guard held his service but a span,)
By careless comrade lamed—ay, sure, the
man
Had no intent to wound or kill.

'Twas a mere accident—as such things are ;
 We see them, children, every day.
Yea, some are born beneath a lucky star
And some bide village-wise, some wander
 far ;
 But each fulfils his fate, they say.

The gossips pointed as he mutely went,
 Lifted, adown an alien street ;
His soul morose, his body sore and bent,
A cripple evermore—such fiat sent
 To yon proud spirit seemed not sweet.

Impious, he mused : three brethren young and
 pure—

 Why not accounted worth indeed
To serve or king or country ? to endure
As others can, and of reward make sure,
 Plucking at last true valour's meed ?

God had forgot him—God forgot those twain—

Let men forget, and deem him dead !

He cursed the sunlight warm, the quickening
rain ;

A misanthrope, he hugged his cloak of pain ;

All creatures shunned his door in dread.

Long time he dwelt thus—slow years silvered o'er

The red gold that had been his crown.

One day he called some varlets, drew out store

Of coin to their pleased sight, and promised more,

And bade them bear him from the town.

Yea, to the hills, the green-clad hills that soothe

A restless mind in malady,

That bid man's brow, like to themselves, grow

smooth,

And, far from noise of city, mart, and booth

Rise calm toward God's tender sky.

'Twas there the gnawing vengeance-pain learned
slake

Its thirst of useless fierce regret :

His heart throbbed loud as though but just awake,
While Nature's choir seemed all the day to make
Such pæans as he knew not yet.

The massive clouds poised on the loftiest edge
Of the wide upland's distant wave,
The trembling weeds within the brooklet's sedge,
Things most diminutive—all brought new pledge,
All a sweet healing message gave.

Each chalk-lined depth, each grim primeval yew,
Slant shadows, clover scent, or may—
Each by its beauty told in tones most true
How broad God's greatness is, how closed our
view,
How vast His power, how small our day.

Yea, as the sick man on kind earth reclined,
 God's light his soul's ingress achieved ;
Again, as in gone years, the fluting wind,
The bees, the swaying grass, within his mind
 From chaos blessed hymnals weaved.

Dame Nature strikes one grand vibrating string
 To which life tunes its melody ;
And fluent counterpoint the glad birds bring
When through thin ether's blue they cleave, or
 sing
 Swayed among emerald domes on high.

Thus was it blind eyes saw, and lips shut long
 Were oped, the heart—a poisoned waste—
Blossomed, and the quick hand wrote down a song
The singer sent his fellow-men among,
 That they his joy might taste.

Strong as a rose in summer swelled that strain,
More bounteous daily, more beloved,
For they that learned it taught the song again ;
So English hearts were neared by its sweet
chain,
By self-same impulse moved.

It told of fairest love and youth most fair,
Of comrades, yet of joys oft riven ;
How each one for his country's sake may spare
Things twain : Life, Death ; although he shall
not dare
To choose how they be given.

Fast this brave rhyme across the counties sped,
Tramped by a nation's eager feet ;
By noblest knights heard with uncovered head
Ere they in wrack of war for England bled
Holding such life-gift sweet.

Unto the common soldiers grew the song,
Like paternoster, known and dear,
And mothers crooned it sleeping babes among,
And, in the market, many a girlish tongue
Would lilt it loud and clear—

While he that wrote lay in the tomb and
slept,
His blurred-out name on ne'er a lip.
Fame reached him not ; unnoticed and unwept
He passed, as drifts from view a dim lamp
kept
On some out-sailing ship.

Yet, though we hear not now the trumpet note
That rang, all-conquering, long ago,
The story lives, how crippled fingers wrote
A warrior's song, and down the ages float
Traditions all aglow,

To tell that he a Titan record won,
Who was in life nor great nor strong,
But by his country's vast acclaim had done
A deed accounted as excelled by none,
With worth of one poor song.

THE GENTLE KNIGHT.

THERE was a fair and gentle knight
Dwelt in his father's hall :
So kindly wont of deed and tongue,
He was beloved by all.

He cared no whit to hurt or slay,
Ne'er rode in field or chase ;
He would not tilt his lance in fight,
Nor strive for lady's grace.

They deemed him fey that saw him sit
And watch the clouds go by,
A-dreaming dreams without an end,
And bend his brows and sigh.

Of clerkly tomes he owned a score,
And these he loved to con
Till the old earl, his sire, waxed wroth
For such unworthy son.

‘Go forth ! thy harness turns to rust,
And pallid grows thy cheek ;
Hast ne’er a friend who needs thine arm
Hast ne’er a foe to seek ?’

‘Friends are but scant, my father dear ;
One enemy I have.
Alas ! his deadly grip is sure ;
He ’ll chase me to my grave.’

Uprose the earl : ‘A coward born !
No child of mine art thou ;
Would I had died ere blot of shame
Deface my good shield now.

‘Haste, haste, and fall upon thy foe,
Sans merci. By the rood,
I will not see thy face again
Till thou have spilt his blood.

‘Here be thy challenge.’ As he spake
The grim earl drew anear;
His gauntlet smote the young knight’s lips
That ashen seemed for fear.

Then strode he frowning from the hall,
That father cruel cold—
And called his squire to saddle steed,
And rode out o’er the wold.

Scarce had he gone a day, I ween,
Of journey scarce a day,

Through field and glen came his own true
men,
And stayed him on the way.

‘Thy son, he lies a-dying,
Chilly as stone he lies—
A wound in his heart from a deadly dart,
And death in his brave blue eyes.’

The earl he turned with ne’er a word,
And galloped to castle gate,
Nor slacked he rein till he came again
To the threshold he reached o’er late.

For lo! in the banqueting chamber,
Where a pool of blood shone red—
With armour dight lay the fair young
knight,
And he lay there stark and dead.

On a bier was he stretched right lowly,
His steel-clad hands as in prayer,
A sword at his side with the gore scarce dried,
And his golden head all bare.

Then the hard old earl, his sire,
Kneeled down on the green rush floor :
' My son, my son, yea, mine only one !'
And he wept full long and sore.

But a fluttering scroll dropt sudden
From the armoured fingers at rest :
' My father, in grace look now on my face,
For I have obeyed thy behest.

' Slain is the foe I dreaded ;
Yea, he is slain, low laid—
Of mine own wild heart, with its fury and smart,
I have long, O long, been afraid !

‘Sith my heart would play the tyrant
I was feared, though I would not yield;
Now I’ve dealt a blow to the demon foe—
My lord, is there stain on our shield?’

THE STORMY PETREL.

HARBINGER of death and danger, o'er the darkling
furrowed sea

Rides the Stormy Petrel telling where the gathered
whirlwinds be.

Bird of Fate, whom we should welcome, counting
thee as truly blest

For thy tidings and thy warnings timely brought
from east or west,

Know'st not that an ill-tongued prophet is by all
men deemed accurst—

He that soonest cries disaster, he that sees far doom
the first?

Thou and thy weird web-foot brethren, sable-featured,
tempest-toss'd,

Ye are held for souls of pirates, errant-drifting,
sentenced, lost,

Spirits of such crafty Norsemen as in rapine ruled
the main,

Shedding blood for very fierceness, lust of treasure
and of gain,

Now condemned to wander ever, evermore to dip
and lave

Black-stained sins, black deeds of old time, in the
crystal-crested wave.

Say, ye wraiths of Viking rovers, grim and dreaded
buccaneers,

Whose vindictive quest of white sails still across
mid-ocean steers,

Tracking wreck and bringing wreckage—say in
mystic demon form

Do ye plan and tread, commanding, every footprint
of the storm ?

Nay, poor Petrel, here's a story writ for thee through
gentler lore :

Named wert thou, that walk'st the water, from the
impetuous saint of yore—

Peter—who by faith would gladly step with trembling
human feet

On the Lord's own shining pathway, there his
gracious Lord to greet.

Fear not. He, whose touch upheld the apostle's life
on Galilee,

Gave thy wings strong and sustaining, O thou
wandering bird, to thee!

THROUGH FIELDS OF ASPHODEL.

SHE moved across the Elysian meads,
Life, Death, gone o'er; behind her lay
The river chill in sombre reeds—
Before her, endless Day.

Yet lagged her feet upon the sward
That gleamed with budding asphodel,
While other pilgrims pressed toward
The glorious citadel.

With outstretched arms, man, woman, child,
They clomb the hill—a joyous band—
And saints serene upon them smiled
Or took them by the hand.

'But who should meet me at the gate,
And greet my lips with tender kiss?
I stayed on earth too late, too late—
I had no thought of this.

'How cruel strikes such lambent glare
On palsied form and withered brow!
O for a veil of golden hair!
I'd hide me in it now.

'Mother and father haply gaze,
Outlooking for their long-lost maid;
Counting as beads past childish days—
To meet them I'm afraid.'

She knelt her down, and masked her face,
Closing dim eyes that might not weep;
'Mid that bright field she dreamed a space,
As in a balmy sleep.

About her sprang the bushes green,
Strange flowers blossomed on tall stems,
And rhythmic singing swayed between
Of birds that shone like gems ;

Till woke she. Near her, silently,
Two beings skimmed the shadowy grass,
Their eyes love-wistful as though she
Were yet a baby lass.

Fair gentle forms and soft arrayed !
Familiar as some well-learned song
Their voices : ' Welcome, darling maid,
Though thou hast tarried long.

' Sing with us, make thy parents glad !'
' Nay, nay, I 'm old.' ' Ah, 'tis not so !
What if thy lips and brow be sad ?
Our daughter dear we know.

‘Here is nor time, nor eld, nor grief,
Naught but a youth divine;
No Autumn plucks the vernal leaf;
 Spring, Summer, both are thine.’

They bore her o’er the shining field,
Within their arms, in childhood’s nest;
Their love made mantle, yea, and shield;
 Her tired soul found rest.

Above was peace, in prismic dome—
Though ne’er a moon nor sun nor star—
And thence a dulcet sigh: ‘Home! Home!’
 That wandered near and far.

IN SLEEP.

THERE is a dream—I have dreamed it oft—I dream
it now and again,
While the sensitive strings of my soul vibrate till
they murmur and cry for pain.

I climb the steps of a tower steep, I weary at foot
and knee,
And still above me in endless height the circling
stair I see.

Yet at a threshold I pause at last, on the mellowed
marble floor,

While my fingers tap in silent rhythm the latch of
a phantom door.

'Tis ajar—I enter, for none says nay, and noiseless
I sweep across

A long low room where my eager walk seems urged
by a soundless force.

Then I tremble, I wait, I hold aloft my shuddering
anxious hands,

I would fain advance, but I may not stir, I am
prisoned by unseen bands,

And I catch my breath as I gaze my fill, and see a
sight that I held

To have slipped away with bygone years like the
fairy tales of eld.

Before me he lies, the brother I loved—his fair and
open brow

By suffering touched, a flower in frost; 'twas wont
to be so, 'tis now ;

And his eyes—where thought and spiritual strength,
like deep streams down in the blue,

Shine swift, and eddy, and surge, methinks—his eyes,
with reproach that is new,

Fix keenly on mine; he rivets my will, and he pins
my speech at bay;

Nay, the slash from a knife were gentler far than
the words he has to say.

‘How long?’ he asks, and his pale hand droops from
the big Greek tome at his side,

‘How long have you left me here forgot, unloved,
untended, denied?’

And hark! as he speaks his voice mounts up, in a
cadence shrill and wild;

Though his thin little shrunken limbs lie still—he is
yet, as he was, but a child.

Has Time passed by and touched him not, for ruth
of the boy’s sweet years,

While we have grown worn in stemming the world,
all shattered by struggle and tears?

While we have grown faint, and our hearts have
ached, and our anguished eyes sore wept,

And he has slept in his captive youth—alone and
unknown, has he slept?

‘But why came you not?’ he upbraids again. And
why, O my God, O why?

I wring my hands, but I answer ne’er; I’ve no
answer to give, not I!

I see the sunshine that filters through from the
casement toward the floor

As God’s fair grace may come to our souls when this
dull life is coldened o’er;

And the blue sky rocks, and the grey walls rock
of the tower in which I stand,

And again I seek—but I move no inch—to stretch
forth a pleading hand.

‘My brother, my brother . . .’ the fiery words from
my seething heart o’erflow;

But voice dies down into quivering grief, and the
blistering tears fall slow.

My brother! Alas, that the throe at my heart grows
great to an opened wound!

And fiercer they rise—remorse and grief—for the
chain that bars me from sound.

I may not utter, nor murmur, nor sob; not a groan,
not a prayer, not a sigh,
While he gazes on with questioning eyes till for pity
I'd like to die.
And his smileless lips as they meet and part are
repeating their dire refrain:
'Why came you never? Why came you not?'

Then I sink with swooning brain,
For I'd give my life, all its past young years, and
any of joy to come,
To have travelled back once, to have sought him
out—twin soul of my childish home!

INTROSPECTION.

Two friends—staunch friends whate'er befel—
Each loved the other passing well ;
The one grave-natured : Daniel,

In name, and race, and thought, a Jew ;
The other Norman, christened Hugh—
But school and college mates are true.

Their generous minds had ever been
Like fair broad fields of playing green,
Duple yet free ; no fence between.

Thus, if they sparred, or if they talked,
Or through deep shades of learning walked,
By divers creeds they ne'er were balked ;

Nay, rather moved to closer grip,
As wrestlers, who shake hands, then trip
Their dearest chums, with smiling lip.

One day—'twas as they slowly paced
The terrace path by roses graced,
O'erlooking russet woodland waste,

Where wave-like distance, peeping blue
As future days, unclear and new
Thrilled misty through the boughs—spake Hugh;

And Mischief set his cheeks alight,
Then, climbing, made his grey eyes bright.
(He e'er was slave to that bold sprite.)

'Friend, we've been comrades through our lives,
Yet ne'er told faults—as men tell wives—
So that each heart its fellow shrives;

‘ Plain faults need plainly probing too.—
You ’re wrong, my Daniel.—Ay, and you !
Here ’s your worst flaw, believe me, Hugh.’

The other pondered. ‘ Were it not
Folly to seek some smoke-grimed cot,
When the wide vale shines free from blot ? ’

But Hugh : ‘ Nay, friendship hath its needs,
Else how spell amity ? One leads
Perchance, yet friends are harnessed steeds ;

‘ Both drag the cart. Or, as twin birds,
Chase the same quarry ; or, as herds.
Together tend their flock of words.

‘ Let both play judge ; though, an you please,
Take we the converse first, at ease—
Our virtues. Pick the best of these !



‘Also in them the lesson lies—
Read me my paradox. Calm skies
Bring storms; snares lurk in girls’ kind eyes.’

But Daniel smiled. ‘Is this your mood ?
You’ll paint for sake of mental good,
The best of me your eyes have viewed ?’

‘I will, fair sir.’ ‘Lurks there my sin ?’
‘More; mine. For if I glance within
Your mirror, I’m askew.’ ‘Begin.’

‘’Tis well. The Hebrew reverence,
Naming Jehovah—no offence—
Seems to my mind your finest tense.

‘But yesterday, your heel had press’d
Some fluttering scrap of card, and lest
God’s name were writ thereon (at best

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A pencil scrawl) you stept aside.'  
'Thus do my race,' the Jew replied.  
'Therein your race takes righteous pride.'

'True,' muttered Daniel. Then the twain  
Upon the path turned slow again,  
Where cedar shadows made blue stain

Though with warm red their boughs were fused.  
'Yea, true,' quoth Daniel twice, and mused  
How oft friend Hugh God's name abused

By roundly cursing. 'Gentiles swear,  
Breaking divinest law, and dare  
With hideous oaths to foul the air.

'Rashly the sacred word they speak ;  
Yet see—you Christians can be meek,  
To smiters turning either cheek.

...

'Tis strange, nigh grand. You kneel before  
The crucifix which you adore,  
Studying meekness o'er and o'er.

'You say: Christ drew the humblest breath,  
And likewise chose the humblest death;  
All things such meekness conquereth.'

Hugh listened. Would, he thought, my friend  
Some Pharisaic ways might mend!  
To pride all Jewish virtues tend!

Then smiled. 'Now for our faults,' he said.  
'Mayhap, as in a toad's grim head,  
Bright gems be there discoverèd.'

But Daniel laughed outright. 'Nay, nay,  
Enough of searching test to-day!  
Come to the bowling-green and play.'

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LONG YEARS AFTER.

GIVE me the brush—I'll hold it in my hand,
And dream a while there's strength in this faint
wrist,

Nerve in these flaccid fingers, beat in pulse
Sprung of hot blood like wine that leaps and burns
Out-bubbling free from vineyards of the south
To crystal beakers—ay, 'twas so of old—
Youth kissed by genius—that's a perfect kiss!
Ripe red warm lips, with fellowship of hands
Fit to defy the world. Once I was young.
Give me the brush, I say—not that one, no!
O'er fair and silken are its shining hairs,
The point too dainty—see the gloss undimmed
Of varnish on the stem! Pah! throw it by.

I'll choose this battered relic of past days.
Poor labourer—pale and care-worn as myself,
As ragged and as bent of back, thy beard
Scant and uneven as mine own—can Time
And Work have brought thee to this sorry pass ?
Thou didst begin life as a slave to Art,
And Art in age, thou see'st, may profit naught ;
And ofttimes those who praise fair handiwork
Forget the doer. He that fills the loom
Gives out the shimmering golden stuff for use,
And faints thereat, most weary—but the king,
The young king in his glory on the throne,
Kicks it aside, yon trailing robe of state,
Or o'er his harness gathers it, to heap
Magnificence upon magnificence.
So with a poem or a pictured song.
'Twas writ or painted years and years ago ;
But he the toiler, nay, he made no name.
Yet 'tis a pretty thing enough—alas !

Poor soul, he died, not famous, and his brush
(Or pen) dropt to the dust, e'en as himself.

How strange to-day's chance meeting, my good
sir !

Such long years since we twain, in Newman Street,
Shoulder to shoulder, chalked the Laocoon,
A-whispering all the while of future days,
When Fame should pluck bay leaves to crown us
both.

You were more idle, I less quick, and so
The grave Professor chid us both, because
(He said) we were like steeds close bridled, each
Failing of duty to the pole between.
Yet for our taste, those merry student days—
When Hope carved pencils, sharpening every point
To sure strong lines of glory—held more sweets
Than older brains may dream of; strange, to-day,
Scarce knew we one another in our beards !

Mine's grey, too. Yet you stretched an eager
hand.

Kind, for I'm poor—look now, my hat's a sight!
Believe me, I'd have gladly passed you by
With haughty step, and stare that fixed you not.
'Nay, friend,' you cried, 'what worlds between our
youth,

And this, the present. You "arrived" in Art,
But I stood still. No matter. Come, I own
A studio near, a palace, and its gem—
Prized far beyond all other treasured toys
My purse has bought—a picture done by you.
Come now and see it, dine with me to-night;
We'll garner up a harvest of old yarns.
You left us at the dawning of your fame,
And we, as under shadow of eclipse,
Lunged at each other, crying: Where is he,
Our country's promise, whither hid away?
You've tried, I hear, the backside of our globe,

Where all bright days are nights, and nights are day,
And fortune so revolves—not always, nay,
But oft—come, comrade mine, a pipe with me.’
Thus spake your courtesy. Yet my coat is
patched—

The priests of Art at times own scanty purse—
And we twain met just where the Green Park’s
fringe

Shadows your Piccadilly’s whitest space;
There Club-land, with its many peering eyes,
Views friendship for a needy suit askance.
Well, raise the picture—ha! a better thing
Than erst I deemed—right worth such gorgeous
frame.

Hurrah for friendship! I’ve one triumph now!
Think you my work would grace the nation’s walls,
Well shrined by lock and key, like burning words
Of some dead poet, classed ’mong titled odes,
Yet lost of lineage, humbly dubbed ‘anon’?

Nay, I'm not dead yet ; here are eyes to see,
A brain to think, a heart to feel swift pain,
When Memory touches each quiescent nerve
Just as a player wakes the silent notes
That have not wailed from some old harpsichord
For dream-benumbed long years. Ay, with this
heart,
These eyes and brain, I'll work yon picture out
Afresh, as in the summer of my youth.

She stood just there—there in her cool white
dress,
As though she had but sauntered down the
glade
Wherein my fancy posed her, yet the breath
Of this dark city with its poisoned stings
Had seared the linen and the bosom too,
Stifling her tender life. Those pleading eyes—

They were no country maid's! They'd worn themselves

Into such yearning gaze because they stitched
Through London days and nights at needlework.

I know a churchyard in the city's core,
And yonder deep in humble grave she lies
And waits for me. The busy people pass
Beside, around, with heedless rapid tread :
The trader who on anxious gain is bent,
Th' apprentice, boyish still and fresh of heart,
The working woman, saddened ere her prime ;
And wizened children, playing at tip-cat,
Crouch on the graves, or beggar girls, quite lost
To what's refined, sit sighing, suckling babes
They'd gladly push beneath the close head-stones,
And stretch out greedy palms to garner pence.
There haply, on a while, some countryman,

Well-nigh distraught with din and press of crowd,
Strolls, tempted by the dust-choked o'er-rank grass
To pause, dreaming of that green resting-place
Where late they laid his mother—and the tears
O'erflow to see God's Acre misused thus.
So from his waistcoat broad he takes a coin
To give one ragged wench, whose great bold eyes
Stare hard because his like she ne'er beheld.

There were two cruel vultures—Want and Woe—
They struck their talons in my sweet one's heart,
And drank her blood. The child died—so died
she,

That never raised her head when he had died.
O sir, you have a noble studio here!
Floors velvet-carpeted, walls hung with silk,
Gold, lapis, and rare marble in the dome,
With touch of agate and of ivory,
To show the colours of your picture up

As autumn buds advantage a red rose.
You know not what it is to toil and moil
In some chill attic, where a woman weeps
Beside the cradle of her sickened babe;
And hear the child, and then the woman, sob,
And hear the woman sigh, and then the child,
And hear the woman pray: God save my child!
Though God turns not to hearken—and work on,
With blur of tears betwixt you and the paint,
And such an anger raising up your gorge
As you could kill whoe'er should cross your path.
So little bread, so scanty warmth for those
You love, and scarce a meagre coin at hand!
How shall you paint when fingers, shuddering blue,
Ill hold the weighty palette—how shall thought,
Rich noble thought, such affluent image find
To deck it as may teach the world your dreams,
When you 've no ell of cloth for wife and child!
How shall your art burn when the coal's used out,

And smouldering scraps yield no more latent fire
Than fading whims of youth which manhood
spurns ?

She stood—well I remember—one sad day,
And watched me work. See this long zig-zag shade
About the foreground, where the sunlight strives
To touch the dock-leaves and the swaying ferns.
I'd mixed a tint for it—she stood close by,
So close I might have counted every thread
Gold spun on her low brows, above the eyes
That were so weary, yet so luminous.
Quoth I : ' Dear heart, always I think of you
As on that one brief holiday of ours—
A daisy 'mid the sunny woodland glade,
A pearl set in some store of emerald
By Hand divine of Him the Jeweller
Who made your soul as flawless as your face.
You in your white gown—look, dear, is it like ?

But now, yes, now, ah ! times have sorry changed,
And I that took the jewel-flower, watch
It droop and dull—great God, I'm going mad !
Why don't you curse me that I spoilt your life ?'
'Not spoilt,' she said, 'oh never, never that !
Love thrives best, surely, on the sunless days,
And I've been blest. But, husband, grant me this :
Give me enough of silver that I go
To buy some shred of black to trim my gown—
Black—ay, not grey—black, black as jet, as
 night,
Because the child died and I cannot mourn.'

Quick then I turned and kissed her on the mouth :
'I have not,' stammered I, 'I have naught left.'
And then I looked, and saw her flowing tears,
And then she brake from me and fled away,
And crouched deep in the window, and sobbed loud :
'I may not mourn,' she said, 'not mourn for him.'

And later on, and as it were in dream,
She said : ' Methinks that when we die we drift
As travellers do who journey by the rail,
For all the things of this cold cruel world
Seem to fly back from us, not we from them.'
And afterward, she scarcely spake a word,
But sat and shivered.

And I flung the paint
Upon the canvas till the night came, dark,
Yet merciful, because it hid from me
The stormy dolour of her pallid face.
Then went I out. I was not cold, I said,
Nor hungry, and I starved that day and next.
I walked to ease the pain that hunger brought ;
I could not sleep. I was too starved to sleep.
And when at last I turned back, she lay ill.
But I unrolled a length of woollen stuff—
Merino, so they called it—and some crape,

I'd pawned my watch to purchase, and I threw
The fierce black folds about her hands and knees.
And she—she smiled—ah yes, remember that!
She smiled at me—not all the diamonds brought
From Scinde, not all the pearls from deep sea mines,
Had brought that smile to her dry parted lips.
I was not hungry then—oh no! the pain
Hid in my temples, where it beat as when
The giant mechanism of some steam thing
Is like to burst and break.

Poor picture mine,
Thou canst not speak, or thou wouldst tell harsh
tales!

O faithful calendar, that chronicled
Day after day the waning of a life!
Each touch of colour here—as charcoal scratch
On prison wall—denotes some further grief
Breathed in the sighs of helpless prisoners,

None less embittered for their helplessness.
And I, as once again I stand to thee,
And stroke thy surface with my finger tip,
Or, by strange faintness smitten, press a while
My enfeebled limbs against the gorgeousness
Of this gilt easel where thou reign'st supreme—
I read the hieroglyphics clearly out
On every tenth of inch of texture rough
Or smooth ; I read familiar lines and signs
Which spell out one and all the same word—Death.
O Death ! that art in nature and in life
Our close familiar comrade day and night,
That starest plain from grandest sights and sounds,
Eke peering from small pebbles and young buds,
Must thou in Art reign also ? Here's a scrap
Of paper writ an hundred years ago—
Say, where's the writer ? And that pictured head,
Good sir, you cherish on your favourite wall—
The girl who sat, perchance has drowned herself ;

And he, the artist, drank himself to death.

Yet, conquering life, his thoughts lie scrawled there-
on :

Brave thoughts that make the picture shine with light

Better than flake white or the madder's rose ;

Grim thoughts that make the laden canvas crack,

Or pierce, like worm-holes, panels through and
through ;

Sad thoughts which make men sigh they know not
why.

He died by inches—so from Life to Death.

Yet lives the picture—so from Death to Life !

A SPACE OF SUMMER.

I.

SUMMER, Summer,
Thou glad comer,
Hasten to my garden door,
For thy tender touch uncloses
Buds of roses ;
And the woods thou sett'st a-ringing
With birds' singing
Sweeter than was heard before.

Summer, Summer,
Gracious comer,
Spring a moment since pass'd by;
All her thin green robes a-trailing,

She 's bewailing
That her queendom fast recedeth,
Thine succeedeth,
And she 's scarcely earned a sigh.

Summer, Summer,
Radiant comer,
She was changeful, thou art true.
Cypris-like, bless with warm breathings,
Perfumed wreathings.
Love and Flora both invite thee ;
To delight thee
Phœbus smiles, and skies are blue.

II.

Summer is wounded—Autumn struck her—broken-
wing'd she lies,
And dies

As a red rose o'erblown, whose honied petals when
they fall

Stain all

The grass with ruddy drops, wind-wafted. Wild
birds hush their song

Along

The fading sedge or copse, where swoon the butter-
flies at breath

Of Death.

III.

Farewell, farewell to Summer sweet !
The swallows on the barn-roof, ranged in line,
Uttered her death decree,
And we
Must hasten our funereal wreaths to twine.

Grey lavender shall swathe her feet,
Where the wan roses stand for sentinels ;

And pansies, and sad yew,
And rue,
Go gather, with the pallid mountain bells.

Nay, let yon purpled saffron greet
The advancing steps of Autumn—gold-crown'd
king—
We mourn our queen's long sleep,
And weep
As droops the garland that our fond hands bring.

TO A FAIR MAID.

(The snowdrop, formerly in England called white bulbous violet, was also known as 'fair maid of February,' because at the feast of the Purification the custom was for girls, dressed in white, to walk in procession.)

HASTE thee early, sweet my lass !
Trip beyond the frozen grass,
Gather in for Candlemass
Each snow-blossom, set
Dainty in its sheath of green—
Helmet bright on silken sheen—
Peeping cold brown mould between,
'Cleft white violet.

In thy hands, thy rosy hands,
Bear the pale faint-perfumed strands ;

They are innocent soft bands
Drawing hearts to prayer.
Be thy thoughts as brave as they,
Though the storm drive on its way
Blackest clouds through night and day—
Kneel thou strong and fair.

Hence grim yew and holly sere !
Here 's a young and tender year ;
Jocund Spring shall soon appear
With gay blossom rife.
Don thy whitest robe, dear maid ;
'Mid thy comrades, thus arrayed,
Pass from home's sequestered shade
Out to nobler life.

SEPTEMBER THOUGHTS.

THE autumn day
Wanes fast away,
And thus, with slower pulse, the year.
Within our garth I walk, to hear
Sweet robins trill from crown of tree,
Brave robins, singing loud and clear
Their ever-answering harmony ;
Like orchard spirits russet drest—
Brown leaves for wings and apple vest.

In misty deeps
The river sleeps,
The pale sun hastes to reach the hill.
Scarce floats a cloud, the air is still ;

The leas are bare that glowed with corn ;
Dead droop the lilies by the mill,
And summer garlands trail forlorn.
Each season spreads a scroll that tells
Its rhythmic rune of link'd farewells.

DECEMBER SONG.

WHO would thy laureate be
And tune for thee,
O cruel Winter, churlish king,
Grim lord of dearth, and ice, and snow,
That com'st with footstep hard and slow
Across the brown and withered leaves
To store thy diamonds in our eaves?
Who would thy triumph sing?

No heralds thine as they,
In bright array,
That weave for Spring her rainbow dress;
Brave maids, they greet her waking hour—
Primrose, Lent lily, and wind-flower.

What though thy frosty mandate's writ
On twinkling lattice-panes—can it
Command our tenderness?

Yet giv'n to thee is grace
Of noblest place
'Mong seasons of our changing earth.
For He Who rules each yearly round
Was lowly born on wintry ground.
Yea, Winter brings the Christmas time;
White Winter, ringing Christmas chime,
Rings in the White Christ's birth.

OF A BIRD-CAGE.

*One of those made in Germany by convicts sentenced
to penal servitude.*

A TINY prison built by prisoned hands
To coop some bright-wing'd thing ; a mimic cell,
Wrought amid sighs by one who knew full well
The smart and pressure of enforced bands,
When high-soul'd courage failed him to assuage
The close-laid torture of a life-locked cage.

Perchance he wept his own deep grief and pain.
Alas, each day the sun rose high to set
In clouds of golden hope ! And yet, and yet,
Time mattered naught. Him freedom called in vain,
As in the future she might beckon it—
That bird now free—who captive here should sit.

Thus with vague sympathy was each space barr'd,
Yet none less sure. Here shall the creature eat,
Here drink, here restless perch in cold or heat,
Setting to melody the sentence hard
Fate spells the words of. Plane the cramping floor,
Bend down the latch, and firmly bolt the door !

COSIE SONG.

Rock thee to sleep, my bonnie, bonnie bairn,
Hush thee to sleep on mither's knee ;
Dream thou o' bowers, a' amang the flowers,
There where the fairy folk be.

Hark! down the glen come the merry, merry men,
Hurrying wi' steady tramp o' feet ;
Now the rain falls, now the wind calls—
Willow leaves lilt a music sweet.

Rock thee to sleep, my bonnie, bonnie bairn ;
Father's o'er the hill folding sheep ;
Hush thee to rest, here on my breast—
Sleep then, my pretty lammie, sleep.

INCONSEQUENCE.

THERE is no rose without a thorn.

But thorns are rife without a rose—
Strong thorns galore, sharp and unshorn,
To cut the cheek and scar the brows.

Beauteous are clouds of silvered fold,
Though better far yon peaceful skies
Whence the warm sun his shafts of gold
Upon our grateful verdure plies.

And deeds are greater gain than words,
Yet some wrongs stain with blackest ink ;
And many a saying, light as curds,
Has wider meaning than we think.

Men's views oft make a cynic smile ;
He holds their praise for what 'tis worth :
O'er-lightly earned, bestowed the while
Unnoticed angels walk the earth.

EARTHWARD.

I PLANTED my standard
In the morn of my days ;
It should soar, O so high !
And in realms of pure sky
Flare out with refulgent rays.

Yet, as time ran to noontide,
It slacked on the mast ;
So fluttered a bit ;
And I pulled soft at it,
To see if the bunting held fast.

But eve curls it lower,
To my wonder and grief;
Now I well-nigh forget
How the King's sign was set,
That has earthward dropt down as a leaf.

THE GOLD-WORKER.

SEE—yonder he sits
The worker in gold and metals,
Welding the rough-edged bits
Into smooth and delicate petals;

Calling aloud for pearl,
Red ruby or blue sapphire,
That the calyx soon may curl
At his will in the rapturous fire.

See—yonder he beats,
And hammers, and slowly fashions
The ore which the furnace treats
As it might our human passions.

Our Creator saith : ' I will make
A form in likeness of mine,
And bid Life's hot flame take
The work to purge and refine.'

So, unless the bauble break,
It becometh a thing divine.

WIND AND FOAM.

O WIND from the west,
O spray from the sea,
Bring ye never the guest
Of my thoughts to me ?
Come, build me a face
With blue eyes and tears,
And the sweet childish grace
Of ebb'd-away years !

O wild west wind !
O salt sea spray !
Ere she left us behind
On that desolate day,

At my bosom she sobbed,
While I clasped her and wept ;
And her heart—how it throbbed !
As yet closer she crept.

O wind and white foam,
Bring her near, bring her here !
Let her ride to me home—
My darling, my dear !
On the wild horses' back,
Down the trough of the sea,
O'er the storm and the wrack,
Come, thou lost one, to me !

SICILIAN SONG.

O HERDSMAN, take thy reedy pipe,
For beauteous Daphne comes anear :
Behold her starry eyes so clear,
Her cherry lips so red and ripe !

Good herdsman, take thy pipe and play.
I'll sit me by yon limpid stream ;
Perchance in pause of some fair dream
My Daphne 'll greet me on her way.

Kind herdsman, music make for me !
For when I see that darling maid
In all her loveliness arrayed,
I'm mute as any stone can be.

TWO MESSENGERS.

Love and Death, God's messengers, armed beside
Him stand.

Love, with eyes divinely bright, close at His right
hand;

Death, in pallid garments wrapt, waiting His com-
mand.

Thence they travel, fast and far, north, south, east
and west.

Can we tell whose stroke of lance wounds each human
breast?

Love may bring the more of pain, Death a sweeter
rest.

WEST OF THE MOUNTAINS.

. WHEN I go

Beyond those heights of dusk'd illimitable snow
Which we call Death, say, dearest, shall my spirit
know

If you sit sad-faced in the vale, the red sun set?
For you the world in gloom—for me in radiance? Yet,
Ah yet, I'll yearn for you! Can I forget? forget?

SONNETS.

SONNET OR SONG.

THE sonnet treads its way with stately air,
As yon princess glides slowly down the hall,
Speeding a smile to some, a bend to all
That make their deep obeissance then and
there.

Or like 'tis to a young monk, wrapt in prayer,
Who, downcast-eyed, cares not what may befall,
But saintly moves amid the lilies tall,
Deeming his well-thumbed missal page more
fair.

Then, if you 'd further ask, I 'd say: a sonnet
Speaks pedant mode; 'tis no light lyric sung

To lute, no idle folly, pranked in bonnet
That, proverb-wise, o'er windmills may be flung.
The student pens grave verse; he's learned to
con it.
A madrigal trips best on lover's tongue.

TO MINE OWN SOUL.

SPEAK to me, O my soul! There is so much
I fain would know of thee. Whence camest
thou,

That, like a spirit, walk'st with veiled brow,
Through din of life beside me? At thy touch
Base things flee exorcised—thou hast for such
A Michael's sword, though heaven did thee
endow

With sorrow's lore and piteous griefs enow.
Lift then my heart; be thou my body's crutch.

Dear soul, thorn-pricked by earth! I've seen
thee turn

From my backsliding paths with discontent.

Strange, if for realms immortal thou wert trained,
That, tarrying here, thou dost not restless yearn—
Fretting the wings by human hands detained—
To speed where, so reluctant, I am bent.

THE PASSING HOUR.

LIFE'S but a shifting of goodbyes. 'Farewell,'
The children lisp to infant joys and plays;
Next, adolescence strains to grasp the bays
Crowning strong manhood's race, and soon a knell
Is by our own hand rung all ears to tell:
'Youth goes, is gone.' Alas, for present days!
See, while we mourn the past, no present stays;
Time's pace grows quicker though our steps
rebel.

Strange beings we. If vainly stretched our arms
When we would garner there some heedless
heart,

Or when before us fades a dear one's breath
Whose certain doom outshadows all alarms—
Yea—when grey Sorrow in Love's home takes
part—
Love cries 'adieu' to Life and prays for Death.

WRITTEN ON MY BIRTH-DAY.

WHEN is my Death-day, solemn dreaded hour,
That gives no yearly witness I must die,
And, rent in fiercest fight, shall swooning lie
While Nature, pitiless, claims back her dower?
Each of us, on Life's tree, is but a flower
Whose wind-blown petals lean to earth or sky
As we toward mean or lofty conquest try—
Though some are plucked in bud for angels'
 bower.

If I but guessed, no longer at mine ease
I'd spend such day in idleness or mirth;
Nay, rather keep long vigil on my knees,

Trusting that some new star, some dawning birth,
From out His inmost shrouded heaven the Lord
might please
To show my fainting soul, for sake of Death's true
worth.

OF REMEMBRANCE.

METHINKS that you 'll remember, when I die,
Not some brave action, nor yet stately speech—
Though sheltered lives to these may sometimes
reach—

But just a turn of lip, a glance of eye,
A trivial jest, a laughing word, a sigh,
A trick too strong to cure, too slight to teach,
Scarce noticed, haply mocked by all and each—
Now a full source of tears you 'd fain defy.

Ah, do not weep! The traveller, having come
From mountain heights, cares naught for drifted
snow,

Nor rock, nor branch, as record of the day :
But plucks a gentian blue and bears it home,
Safe in his bosom—I would have you so
Keep one sweet speck of love at heart alway.

LOVE'S DIAPASON.

AN octave is the tonic come again.
Thus with the gamut of affection is 't.
In gay or minor key, what clef we list,
Love, that first-uttered note, Love ends our
strain—

A common scale, too oft intoned in vain,
Yet through the whole world breathed; and.
if quite miss'd
By any heart that's lone, unloved, unkiss'd,
May dusk of peace bring bandage for her
pain !

Yea, some dwell voiceless; some are surely born
With poet-soul, though no hand try the strings,

And thus the dreaming melody's ne'er heard.
Yet, all the while, Love's concords lie forlorn,
In dungeon-chain, spirits of song whose wings
Should bear abroad his name : Life's fairest word.

LOVE SAYING.

DEAR, when you come, my heart, o'erdone with
ice,

Is like a stream that hears the voice of Spring
Among the mountains. With glad murmuring
It breaks chill ways, leaps high, unlocks each
vice

Through secret tools of joy, and in a trice
Bids every pebbled path or runnel sing ;
Then calls the fauns and dryads so they bring
Young leaves to twine the trees with green device.

Next, swift adown the hill my fond heart flows,
And drops unto the broad and kingly lake

That waits—as you might—calmly. By and by,
When overhead yon pallid twilight grows,
The silver stars their watery compeers wake,
And this, methinks, means blessing from on high.

ON THE CARDS.

A HOUSE of cards I once for pastime made.
Each wall against some neighbour tipped or
 leaned ;
The inmost bower of chief delight was screened,
And on a velvet floor most deftly laid.
Yet, sudden, with a touch the fabric swayed ;
My princely dwelling tottered low, demeaned ;
So kings fell prone, and mighty dames, who'd
 queened
It o'er the court subservient, dropt to shade.

I mused of woman's life ; methought each suit
Found place ; gay robes and *Diamonds* bright she
 had

A wealthy spouse—what if he were a brute?
And praise from Pall Mall *Clubs* to make her glad.
Came by the *Knave of Hearts*; her soul grew sad.
Last, Death drew near, with *Spade* and mourners
mute.

FOLK-SONGS.

OUR lives are tunes by untaught voices sung
In widest range. Some breathe but few bars'
lease,

And thenceforth silence ; some a minor piece.
From pallid lips are grievous dirges wrung ;
By valiant knights loud trumpet-blasts are
flung ;

While gay hearts trip to dancing jigs at ease.
Strange hands oft add what harmonies they
please,

Roaming the wide world's ivory keys among.

Yon cantus haply with full chords is set ;
Through this the florid counterpoint flits fast.

L

And here, 'mid changeful notes that throb and
fret,

One deep-toned chime of pain's recurrent cast.

If grief's our figured bass, let none regret—

God's Perfect Cadence closes Life at last.

EVENING AFTER RAIN.

(A PICTURE BY GEORGE BOUGHTON, R.A.)

THE storm is past—soft twilight brings repose.
Blue's in the sky, yet here and there o'er-run
With clouds flushed by an unseen setting sun,
While lamplight from the cottage window glows.
They stand there by the gate—fond school-
fellows—

Two slender girls, whose grudging farewell done
Still lingers in their looks; black-robed, the one
Must stay, the other flower-laden goes.

What is that sad heart's narrow fate? Her friend,
Leaving the dusky homestead, its grey road

Rain-sodden, the lone cliff, the sombre yews,
To a more garish lot will gladly wend,
Life's joy her meed, rose-wreaths her only load ;
For few there be who twilight shadows choose.

B. C. 500.

OLD Age, avaunt! for I will none of thee.
Better far Death, so my staunch feet may go
Firm on their way to realms of Dis below,
Than with eld palsied and reluctant be.
Bring robes purpureal; bind my brown locks;

see

How sweet the sacrificial roses blow!
Youth's swift aweary of this world, to grow
Love-sick of Hades and Futurity.

Who comes? Who sings? Nay, silence, girl,
away!

For if Eurydice her Orpheus lured

Beyond the tombs, at thy fond pleading I
In this glad world must fain elect to stay.
Thy shackling beauty—like to cords assured—
Back to thy white arms draws me : I'll not die !

LUCINDA'S LETTERS.

I.

I saw the postman speed along the street,
And wished him Hermes' wings in lieu of feet :
'Haste, laggard, haste, why can'st thou not before ?
Then ran downstairs to rifle what, at door,
The letter-box might give. But, when I took
A pale blue crinkling thing in hand, my look
Bent jealous on it, quick methought : 'How much,
O cruel carrier, has thy vulgar touch
Profaned the love-lined letter sped to me
By yon dear hand across the silver sea !'

II.

My bullfinch caught the trick from some brave
 nightingale

 To pipe a woodland tune—so he,
When twilight bids the sun and shade alike grow pale,
 Makes tender melody.

Ah ! soon we learn that in the garish hours of day
 Our clearest songs are poorly heard ;
A wise man stills at noon, when chatterers have their
 say,
And hoards till eve his word.

What means such evening ? Calm and sacred solitude,
 Wherein the poet loves to find
Blue violet-blooms of thought to wreathe his vagrant
 mood,
Or, best—a kindred mind.

Then haste you, come, dear heart, for I wait praying
here,
I, your soul's twilight, fraught with rest ;
Songless, o'er-dark, until your voice fall on mine ear ;
Then by sweet music blest.

III.

I SEND you, dear, for your birthday,
A bunch of this love of mine ;
The roots are dusty with touch of earth,
Yet the blossom, methinks, is divine.

So take the flowers and wear them,
Treasure them close in your breast ;
They had not sprung but for earthly soil ;
They bloomed by God's own light blest.

I V.

You hold my heart within your hand ;
 'Tis a frightened thing, a bird
 That quick, at look or word,
May soar away from an unsafe strand.

Then keep my heart within your heart ;
 'Twere sheltered there, would sing,
 Nor seek (I vow) to wing
Its flight to an alien land apart.

V.

You 're not here !
I sit me sadly by the hearth ;
I wander slowly round the garth—
Where 's my dear ?

Empty March !
Within the flower-beds brown mould only,
And one grey dove is swinging lonely
On the larch.

VI.

Off we wander, in my dreams,
Through the woods and by the streams ;
Earth is bare and rills run dry
For our dull reality.

Ne'er by Fancy willed apart,
Hand in hand, we 're heart to heart.
Fact compels you far away
In this world of everyday.

Only crafty Eros can
Mighty plains and mountains span
From his wing he pulls a feather—
By such quill we 're bound together.

VII.

TELL me, dear, just this one thing:
When your roaming thoughts take wing,
Float they, as gay butterflies
That 'twixt roses dip and rise?
Or, like sweet doves at a spring,
Drink they deep and tender-wise
Of that love our poets sing?
Or—an eagle—from the skies
Gleans your spirit, as it flies,
Mighty cloud-wrought phantasies?

VIII.

I HAVE grown wise
In the space of a year ;
Grief's in mine eyes,
But I shed no tear.

Tears cannot make
A raft or a boat,
Nor even a lake
Whereon thou shalt float.

When art thou coming
To bid me be glad ?
Swallows are homing—
My lad, my lad !

M

Fate may have tied
Weak foot or hand;
Yet to thought's denied
No pass of the land :

Page-like and dumbly,
Disguised but at rest,
My heart follows humbly
The heart she loves best.

IX.

AH! if I might be
All I would to thee,
That were Heaven to me.

But, as my poor worth
In thy mind seems dearth,
This to me is Earth.

X.

I WOULD I were a book,
To lean against thy knee ;
Thy thought should turn to me,
And with thy thought thy look.

And, with thy look, thy heart
That down each line might read
What's writ there clear indeed :
Love's gladness and Love's smart.

Nay, fain I'd be the pen
That shapes for thee my name ;
Oft to this darling dame
We'd speed fond missive then !

'My love'—so shouldst thou spell;
Nor pause o'erlong to think,
But dip me quick in ink,
And add: 'I love thee well!'

X I.

ONCE, a captive queen was lifted
By a cloud of flying birds ;
So my willing heart is drifted
On these swift-wing'd words.

She—the exile—home was carried,
From all pain and sorrow freed ;
I—alas ! my body's tarried :
You've my heart indeed.

XII.

ALL yester-eve I read Theocritus,
So dreamed we sat close hand-locked, you
and I,
Beneath a sapphire-blue Sicilian sky,
The peaceful kine-crowned hills surrounding
us.

You Daphnis; I a wood-nymph, Naïs named,
And, as we sat—wreathed white anemone
Bound in our hair—and gazed out toward the
sea,
Joy, with her gilding touch, the picture
framed.

And yet, meseems, 'mid London smoke-grimed
walls

For ilex groves, for beauty ugliness,

Love's shepherd-pipe carries no sweetness less,

But through our murky streets still leads and calls.

XIII.

I HAVE a calendar;
A pile of card pinned up against the wall.
I turn the leaves; the harvest time grows nigh;
And yet this frozen year, in wintry sky,
Is still a clouded star,
Hid by dark Janivere's funereal pall.
I count my lonely days—the past's out-torn—
Succeeding months are pictured; daffodils
For March, for April gleaming rills,
And May has apple-bloom and rosy thorn;
But June—ah, sweet warm love-fraught June!
Come soon!
Thy 'leit-motiv' the throstle's tune!

XIV.

I HEARD a song to-day,
And the lilt was sweet.
It dropt from a window open and high ;
No singer could I there espy,
But the tune winged out to the open street,
And cheered me on my way.

I also fain had sung,
But my heart's o'er-sad.
In tears my music seemed to close—
So dew-drops quench a perfumed rose—
And the joy evoking that love-lilt glad
Uttered an unknown tongue.

XV.

O, BUT I'm happy ! Let none say me nay.
I con the book you gave me ere you went ;
I clasp the letter you so lately sent—
I'm busied all the day.

What if sometimes the book shuts on my knee,
Marked by a kiss ? What if the letter's stained
By tears that o'er its tenderest words have rained ?
I'm happy—come and see !

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